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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000119

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NOFORN

E.O. 12958 DECL: 01/19/2016

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH THE NSA EVENING OF 18 JANUARY 2005

Classified by Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

1. (S/NF) On January 18, 2006, Nigerian National Security Advisor (NSA) Aliyu Mohammed told the Ambassador that he expected a quick resolution of the Delta hostage crisis. He said he would be a candidate for the presidency in 2007 if President Obasanjo steps down at the end of his second term and if Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) chooses not to run. He also raised the possibility of a military coup should President Obasanjo manipulate the political process to stay in office after his term expires.

Assessment of the Hostage Crisis and General Stability in the Niger Delta

2. (S/NF) Aliyu Mohammed said that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) had established a committee to resolve, through negotiation, the current hostage crisis in the Delta. The committee is chaired by Bayelsa State Governor Jonathan Goodluck, and includes his Deputy Governor, representatives from the state governments in the region, the Nigerian military, the State Security Service (SSS), and the National Police Force (NPF). Aliyu said that while the committee had only just started its work, he believed the crisis would be over within the next 24-48 hours, with the hostages being released in return for unspecified FGN undertakings. He raised the possibility that in lieu of responding to the hostage-taker demands that Ijaws Dokubo Azari and deposed governor of Bayelsa state Diepreye Alamieyeseigha be released, the state governors would undertake to increase the number of Ijaws in their governments. However, in virtually the next breath, he said that the FGN and the committee still did not know which militia group was actually holding the hostages, and that the previous day, negotiations had been with the "wrong" militia group.

3. (S/NF) Aliyu said that the basic Niger Delta Region issues must be addressed, otherwise, the cycle of violent attacks against oil sector infrastructure and personnel will only continue. He cited poverty and unemployment as the two key factors contributing most to the state of lawlessness and admitted the failure of the FGN, State, and Local governments to undertake and execute the reform programs necessary for development. Aliyu also said that the local militias "outgunned" the military assets at the disposal of the FGN in the Delta. He said that there are two key issues where the FGN most needs our help: (1) strengthening the FGN's military and police capacity and (2) interdicting the oil bunkering, the profits of which fund the militias. It is the profits from oil bunkering, he said, that enable the militias to purchase war materiel such as small assault weapons, rocket propelled grenades, and ammunition. Aliyu claimed that the local state governors are responsible for "98 percent" of the oil bunkering. Aliyu observed that the FGN hesitated to send in the Nigerian military to deal with the disparate militias (many of which have links to the governors) for fear that it would overreact, resulting in such humanitarian and political disasters as the Zaka Bian and Odi massacres, mentioning them by name. Recalling previous suggestions of assistance by EUCOM to help improve security in the Niger Delta, he noted with regret the FGN's reluctance to accept outside help.

4. (S/NF) The Ambassador expressed concern over the loss of oil production. He noted rapidly increasing world petroleum prices. Aliyu responded by saying that production has not yet been drastically affected: Shell has only lost 130 - 150 k barrels per day (bpd) in production capability. Aliyu also said that Shell has committed not to shut down production in fields unaffected by militia activity. He noted that ExxonMobil has spoken to him regarding security threats, but he doubted they were sufficient to cause it to draw down in production. The Ambassador asked whether he could confirm if Agip or Total had also suffered from attacks. Aliyu said he had not heard of any. The Ambassador then asked him for his frank assessment as to whether the current violence was, in essence, the declaration of war against the oil companies, which the militia group Movement for the Emancipation of

the Niger Delta (MEND) makes it out to be. Aliyu responded that the militia groups were simply increasing their level of rhetoric to force more oil company concessions, and that in another week or two, the region's stability would be restored.

15. (S/NF) The Ambassador asked Aliyu how he thought China and other South and East Asian countries would react to the violence in the Delta. He replied that both China and India are primarily concerned with securing access to the natural resources they require and that they are undeterred by the real or perceived safety concerns of the Delta Region. He also noted that former Minister of Defense Theophilus Y. Danjuma (a long-term Nigeria kingmaker) is currently negotiating oil contracts with China.

Assessment of President Obasanjo's Third Term Agenda

16. (S/NF) Aliyu told the Ambassador that he would run for President in 2007 if Obasanjo and former Chief of State Ibrahim Babangida do not. What the President intends to do is not clear. Aliyu noted that when potential candidates express interest in running for the Presidency, Obasanjo "frowns" at them. Aliyu said Obasanjo would like to change the constitution so that he can legally contest for a third term. However, Obasanjo has not yet determined what his chances of success would be. Aliyu said that he has discussed a possible Obasanjo third term with many in his "peer group," who feel as he does: no matter how good a job Obasanjo is doing, a constitution must not be changed for the benefit of one person. Aliyu discussed two key challenges facing Obasanjo and his third term bid. First, Obasanjo is deeply unpopular with the masses of Nigerians who are progressively impoverished, while the richest one percent of Nigerians, who are getting richer because of the economic reform program and higher oil prices, support his third term aspirations. Second, Aliyu said that in light of the President's efforts to impose and support adherence to constitutions in other places in Africa, such as Togo, Obasanjo's manipulation of the political process in Nigeria would undercut his -- and Nigeria's -- international reputation.

17. S/NF) Aliyu said that Obasanjo is raising vast sums of money for a possible third term bid. Obasanjo is working through a consortium called Transcorp, which is controlled by some of the country's richest elite, including Gbenga Obasanjo (the President's son) and Aliko Dangote, one of Nigeria's richest men. (Transcorp recently purchased the Nicon Hilton Abuja, the largest hotel in Sub-Saharan Africa.) Should Obasanjo try to amend the constitution, Aliyu continued, bribery and intimidation would be widespread if the effort were to succeed. Aliyu said that likely bribes would be 130 million Naira for a National Assembly Senator, 75 million Naira for a member of the House of Representatives, and 30-35 million Naira for members of State Assemblies. He also confirmed that Obasanjo is using the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to attack his political enemies. He cited EFCC investigation of the state governor of Enugu, formerly a very close friend of Obasanjo, once he expressed interest in the Presidency. Aliyu observed that Obasanjo "would take a Sergeant from the Nigerian Army and make him President of Nigeria rather than hand over to Atiku," the current Vice President. Aliyu noted that Obasanjo has successfully dismantled much of Atiku's political machinery and his financial base. If Obasanjo succeeds in staying in power for a third term, Atiku will "be either in exile or in jail." Aliyu said that Obasanjo's enmity toward his Vice President and erstwhile political ally is solely based on Atiku's presidential aspirations.

18. (S/NF) Turning to former Head of State, Ibrahim B. Babangida (IBB), Aliyu commented that IBB is not really interested in the Presidency, but rather in remaining a relevant player in Nigerian politics. He said that there are those around IBB, however; whose livelihoods would be severely affected should the former chief of state be marginalized. And, Aliyu continued, IBB's wife has ambitions to be First Lady. Aliyu said he and IBB would be meeting with Obasanjo on January 19 to try to "smoke out" the President's real intention about 2007. In any event, he continued, by March 2006, it should be clear whether or not Obasanjo will run for a third term.

19. (S/NF) Aliyu said that his assessment is, if Obasanjo contests for a third term, it will be a catalyst for instability in Nigeria. Aliyu said that he is concerned over the potential for a military coup, undertaken by mid-ranking officers if their seniors hold back, such is the popular dissatisfaction with the status quo. In effect, as in the past, "Nigeria would invite the army back to save the state." The Chief Justice is already complaining that the Obasanjo government rides roughshod over rulings of the Supreme Court. Instability in the Delta is undermining the security of the entire country, the North is marginalized

and the people are ever more impoverished. Thus, there may be already reason enough to call in the military. Obasanjo remaining in power past 2007 could be the tipping point. And, if the military leadership did not move, then middle-rank officers would. The result would be a resumption of Nigeria's "coup culture" - - but more violent and bloody than in the past.

10. (S/NF) Comment: Aliyu contradicted himself on the current Delta crisis, saying in one breath that it will soon be over, and in the next, that the FGN lacks the military capacity to resolve the security issues - - thereby implying that the FGN will not be able to resolve the crises in the short term. He says that there is now the political will to address such deep seated problems as lack of development and oil bunkering. Aliyu showed confidence in the ability of Governor Goodluck's committee to resolve the immediate crisis.

11. (S/NF) Comment, continued. More than the Delta, Aliyu wanted to talk about his own presidential aspirations and what Obasanjo is going to do. At present, Aliyu thinks that Obasanjo will try for a third term -- and, if successful, will so destabilize the state that a military coup would be a distinct possibility. Like many other "establishment" Nigerians, Aliyu is particularly frightened of a "mid-level" officer coup, with its potential for radicalism. However, Aliyu, like Vice President Atiku, thinks that Obasanjo "may come to his senses" -- by the end of March. Aliyu's open discussion of the possibility of a coup was chilling; he has been involved in most of them since the end of the Biafra war. Aliyu badly wants the presidency, but, he will only actively seek it if both Obasanjo and Babangida step aside. Aliyu appears to be close to breaking with Obasanjo, whom he has served for the past six years, and there are rumors of his impending resignation. While Aliyu seemed to agree when the Ambassador talked about the importance of free and fair elections in Nigeria, he also appears remarkably sanguine about his ability to win, even though he is largely unknown to the Nigerian man in the street. End comment.
CAMPBELL